DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 158 CS 014 396

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TITLE An Important Aspect of Guided Reading: Books Galore! Classroom Connections.
INSTITUTION Reading Recovery Council of North America, Columbus, OH.
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 3p.
AVAILABLE FROM Reading Recovery Council of North America, Inc., Suite 100, 1929 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1069. Tel: 614-292-9111. Web site: http://www.readingrecovery.org.
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080) -- Opinion Papers (120)
JOURNAL CIT Council Connections; v5 n3 p26-28 Spr 2000
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Books; *Early Intervention; Emergent Literacy; Primary Education; Program Descriptions; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Materials; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Guided Reading Procedure; *Reading Recovery Projects

ABSTRACT

This article contends that guided reading is one of the principal teaching techniques of primary classroom reading programs, and is an excellent way to provide classroom reading instruction to Reading Recovery children as well as children who do not need intensive intervention. The first section describes what exactly guided reading is and discusses why it is effective. Noting that for the full effect of guided reading to be realized, classroom teachers must have a generous supply and variety of books, the second section outlines how teachers can get more books. It discusses how to get books, how to level them, the importance of a variety of books, and the challenge of devising a system for organizing and storing books. In conclusion, the article discusses the importance of thorough teacher training (as well as time, money, training, dedication, and books) in implementing an effective guided reading program. (RS)

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An Important Aspect of Guided Reading: Books Galore!

Classroom Connections

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Classroom Connections

An Important Aspect of Guided Reading: Books Galore!

This column is designed to serve Reading Recovery partners: the classroom teachers who work together with Reading Recovery teachers to teach children to read and write.

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A note from Joe Yukish, Editor, Classroom Connections:

In this issue the Classroom Connections column brings you:

1. *A school administrator who has taught young children, and still has the effective teaching of children as her focus.*
2. *A first-grade teacher who operates a successful guided reading program in an enviable context.*

Together they answer those questions some classroom teachers ask about guided reading instruction, "What exactly is guided reading?" and "How do I get more books for guided reading? I don't have six of anything."

Currently, guided reading is one of the principal teaching techniques of primary classroom reading programs. As a matter of fact, walk into any classroom that embraces the parameters of a balanced literacy program, and guided reading groups are the mainstay of the morning. Guided reading is an excellent way to provide classroom reading instruction to Reading Recovery® children as well as children who do not need intensive intervention. As a classroom support for Reading Recovery children, guided reading lessons provide the opportunity for students to practice and deepen the strategies they are learning.

The teacher plays a key role in the success of a guided reading lesson. The format of the lesson looks deceptively simple. The lesson elements include:

(a) An introduction appropriate to the needs of the student and characteristics of the book, followed by

(b) Supported reading with specific guidance from the teacher, followed by

(c) Focused teaching of a specific skill and or strategy, and ending with

(d) Some form of follow-up activity.

If the guided reading lesson meets the needs of all children in the group, these steps become very complex. Therefore, an appropriate and smoothly orchestrated guided reading lesson, requires a knowledgeable teacher who understands the reading process, knows her students' reading strengths and needs, and is well acquainted with "mountains" of books.

Why guided reading?

During guided reading, small groups of four to six children meet regularly for thirty-minute lessons. All children in the group share a common characteristic: they can read all text used during the guided reading lesson with 90-95% accuracy. Although the children are grouped homogenously, membership in the group is flexible and dynamic (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996). As the strengths and needs of the group members change, so do the groups. One purpose of flexible, guided, small group instruction is to help students acquire the behaviors and strategies of a good, independent reader. Accurate reading is not enough. To become truly independent, the reader must develop "fix-up" strategies (Keene and Zimmerman, 1997) that enable complete processing and comprehension of the messages in text. The opportunity for children to read in this way is accomplished as the teacher continually adjusts, or differentiates, instruction to accommodate the interests, needs, and abilities of the students (Caldwell & Ford, 1996). Differentiation of instruction is difficult during reading lessons with the whole class; the small group setting makes differentiated instruction more manageable.

Merlin Wittrock (1990) maintains *real learning* results when students are led to make connections among ideas in text as well as between their existing experience and knowledge of what is presented in the text. All students reading the same book in the context of a small group promote this type of generative learning. The small group setting provides ample opportunity for all students to participate in discussions. As group membership changes, different interactions are possible, giving students diverse perspectives and additional opportunities to generate new connections.

There are many characteristics of guided reading that are in line with Vygotskian thinking. What is Vygotskian thinking? Vygotsky considered learning a shared process that takes place in a social context. He felt that a child's intellectual and skill development are directly related to how they interact with adults and more capable peers in specific problem-solving situations (Rueda, 1990). A guided reading lesson is structured to allow the teacher and/or other participants in the group to mediate the process the reader is using to clarify text meaning through problem-solving strategies (Smith and Elley, 1998). The teacher enhances a child's thinking and language development by deliberately and appropriately interacting with the child during the lesson. Initially, the teacher models, shows and explains,

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instructing students in how to use a specific skill or strategy. After understanding of the new learning is demonstrated, the teacher moves to prompting student use of the skill or strategy before expecting students to demonstrate independent application of the behaviors. Guided reading provides an excellent context to support the teaching interactions Vygotsky advocates.

Guided reading lessons also provide the teacher with an opportunity to carefully observe and assess children's reading progress. Rich data can be gathered in all phases of the lesson. During the book introduction, for example, a teacher is able to carefully monitor children's background knowledge and language development. During any phase of the lesson, teachers have the opportunity to record one or two children's reading of a text passage in a running record or an informal reading inventory. This written documentation creates valuable archives of reading progress, strategy development, and areas of strength and need. During and after reading, a teacher who listens carefully to the dialogue among the members of the group can gain insights to their thinking. For example, children's reasoning is often revealed through the predictions, connections, and reflections they make. This continuous assessment helps the teacher better meet the needs of every reader and plan the most effective guided reading lessons.

For the full effect of guided reading to be realized, teachers must carefully plan their lessons. They must have a generous supply and variety of books. These books enable teachers to facilitate the teacher/child interactions described above while students explore material they can read and enjoy. Teachers also need a system for managing their books. A first grade classroom teacher, whose guided reading instruction results in real and significant student learning, addresses these issues in the remainder of this article.

A first grade classroom teacher knows: Books are critical!

In order to implement a guided reading program, a classroom teacher must have the necessary resources. A wide range of books that differ in readability, genre, and student interest must be readily available. Then, teachers can effectively match appropriate books to readers in a guided reading group.

Books: How to get them

Obtaining guided reading books does not have to be a difficult process. There are many innovative ways to build an extensive guided reading library. In most instances, guided reading texts can be purchased through district budgets or grant funds.

Books can also be purchased with funds offered by some school districts through incentive pay projects. For example, a colleague and I applied for and received a district mini-grant to obtain additional nonfiction guided reading texts. Although my school had a sufficient collection of guided reading books, it was nice to expand the repertoire of books available to students by taking advantage of these monetary resources.

Administrative support (e.g., curriculum supervisors, principals, reading consultants, etc.) is imperative. If administrators see merit in guided reading, they can play an integral part in creatively securing funds for the purchase of many books. Although guided reading materials might be shared among grade-level partners, it would not be necessary for teachers to compete for books if there is a sizable allocation of resources.

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) offer other creative suggestions for increasing multiple copies of books. They propose that teachers recycle selections from anthologies and add these to their collection of leveled texts. Books can be obtained at bargain prices from companies such as Scholastic or Troll Books. Accumulating bonus points from these companies allows teachers to get additional books. Another source of multiple copies of books is for teachers to put together collections of books they have gathered throughout the years. Remember, the acquisition of books is a gradual and costly process that can be spread out over time (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996).

Books: How to level them

Collecting large supplies of books is not enough. Teachers must have some idea of the difficulty level of these books. Readability level, interest, and genre are three critical factors to consider when purchasing and leveling guided reading books. A well-rounded guided reading library includes a wide range of books at different levels of the continuum of reading development.

Groups of teachers can collectively level books they have accumulated. Fountas and Pinnell (1999 and 1996) suggest lists of characteristics and procedures for leveling books that teachers can use independently. They suggest using characteristics such as the physical layout of the book, the structure of the language, and the story complexity when determining the readability (or level) of a book. Another alternative is to enlist the help of Reading Recovery teachers, language arts consultants, and other colleagues who have experience leveling books.

Publishing companies, reading authorities, special programs, or state adopted curriculum frameworks use different terminology to classify the various stages of reading development and book levels. For example, Reading Recovery uses a number system to represent the difficulty level of text, whereas others assign letters or "broad-band" names (emergent, upper emergent, etc.) to different levels of texts. Fountas and Pinnell (1999, p. 26) and Yukish and Lanning (1999, p. 10) offer charts that assist teachers in sorting out these different types of leveling systems.

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An Important Aspect of Guided Reading Continued ...

Books: Getting a variety

Student interest is another factor to be considered when purchasing books. Students are more likely to be motivated to read if they are reading books that interest them. Therefore, selected books should represent a variety of topics and genres. For example, my students enjoy non-fiction material, and I would estimate that approximately fifty percent of my students borrow informational books from the library every week. With this in mind, I make sure to include nonfiction books when I select materials for my guided reading groups. Fairy tales, fables, plays, realistic fiction, how-to books, and poetry are just some of the other genres that are available for my guided reading lessons.

The next big challenge: An organized book room

Once materials are secured, it is important to devise a system for organizing and storing books. Each classroom teacher needs to have easy access to leveled books in a central location.

Finding storage space is the first step. For example, books can be housed in a project room, an office, an extra classroom, or a very large closet. After finding a place to store books, they need to be organized in an efficient manner. In my school, our Reading Recovery teachers have leveled our books and arranged them in order by readability levels. Sets of books are contained in plastic bags and stored in baskets labeled with the reading level of the books. A laminated list of all the book titles is also included in each basket. Finally, the level and the number of running words are recorded on a dime-sized sticker on each book. To expedite finding specific titles, I also recommend arranging books in alphabetical order within each leveled basket.

In order to keep track of our many titles, we have a sign out book for borrowed texts. Teachers record the book titles and number of copies they borrow. This system appears to be working well; teachers are able to readily locate specific books.

Books are not enough

Availability of books must be accompanied by sound, thorough teacher training in implementing an effective guided reading program. There are a number of resources that educators can consult to further their understanding of guided reading instruction. For example, the textbook *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children* (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) is an invaluable teacher resource that I refer to on a regular basis. My school system also offered a number of workshops on how to implement guided reading in the classroom. Reading Recovery teachers, language arts consultants, and presenters from outside our district have been continual sources of information on topics such as interpreting running records, the components of a guided reading lesson, and general management issues that must be considered when establishing guided reading groups.

An Early Success grant and our district Title I funds have enabled us to hire additional staff to support early literacy learning. We have the good fortune of having three Reading Recovery teachers and one Title I teacher who co-teach guided reading with first grade teachers. This arrangement allows us to meet with every guided reading group five days a week. Working closely with other colleagues provides the opportunity for constant professional dialogue between teachers on how to refine guided reading instruction and practices. This is a unique but ideal situation made possible through external resources (i.e. grant funds).

Implementation of a guided reading program requires time, money, training, dedication, and books. But, guided reading is well worth the effort and commitment. Children's reading improves as the teacher provides appropriate and focused instruction in a small group setting. As children become better readers, their thirst for reading more books begins to grow.

We both wish you BOOKS GALORE to satisfy the independent readers you create with your successful guided reading program.

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